



TO: Chairman Pringle and Authority Board Members

FROM: Dan Leavitt, Deputy Director

DATE: May 6, 2010

**RE: Merced – Sacramento Section - Board Briefing on Initial Alternatives
Agenda Item 8**

The purpose of this agenda item is to summarize the progress of the Merced – Sacramento Section of the California High-Speed Train (HST) Project, and to recommend the initial alignment alternatives and station locations to be carried forward for initial review during the alternatives analysis (AA) process for this section. The Merced to Sacramento section is approximately 110 miles long extending north from the Merced Station, to a terminal station in Sacramento. Intermediate HST Station stops are proposed to be located in Stockton and the Modesto area.

Linkage to the Altamont Corridor Rail Project

The Altamont Corridor Rail Project is being planned to connect to the Merced – Sacramento Section in the vicinity of Lathrop / Manteca. This would allow regional trains compatible with the HST system to operate between the Bay Area (via Tracy) and points north as far as Sacramento and south as far as Merced and vice versa when the Altamont Corridor is constructed to HST standards. Therefore, planning activities between these two corridors are being closely coordinated.

San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission as Local Partner for Regional Service

San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission (SJRRRC) is interested in providing regional service in this section. SJRRRC hopes to take advantage of the capacity available on the High-Speed Train (HST) mainline north of Merced to operate intercity and commuter trains serving regional stops which would be developed in addition to the four identified HST stops (Sacramento, Stockton, Modesto and Merced). In conjunction with the Altamont Corridor, SJRRRC could potentially operate regional trains in this section not only between Merced and Sacramento, but between these points and the Bay Area (via Tracy and the Altamont Corridor). SJRRRC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Authority in May 7, 2009, to jointly develop the corridor and has agreed to serve as a Responsible Agency under the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the Environmental Impact Report (EIR). SJRRRC has also committed to contribute funding for the project.

Central Valley Rail Policy Working Group

SJRRC has established the Central Valley Rail Policy Working Group (Working Group) to provide input on the Merced – Sacramento EIR/EIS. The Working Group is composed of senior staff and policy makers representing jurisdictions located throughout the corridor:

- Sacramento Regional Transit District
- San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission / Altamont Commuter Express (ACE)
- Caltrans Division of Rail
- California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley
- City of Sacramento
- City of Elk Grove
- City of Galt
- City of Lodi
- City of Modesto
- City of Turlock
- City of Merced
- Merced County
- Merced County Association of Governments
- Sacramento County
- Sacramento Council of Governments
- San Joaquin County Council of Governments
- Stanislaus County
- Stanislaus Council of Governments

The Working Group partners with the Authority throughout the project development process; provides guidance on local issues, development plans and policies; assists in developing and evaluating alternatives; serves as liaison to local communities; participates in public involvement activities and events; and generally helps to develop consensus regarding project goals, objectives and major elements. The Working Group meets approximately bi-monthly and the Sacramento – Merced section is a regular agenda item for status reports and input. This involvement will continue as the Project Development process proceeds.

Accomplishments

Accomplishments over the past year have included:

- Brought the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) on board as sponsor of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS); the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers may serve as a Cooperating Agency under the provisions of the National Environmental Protection Act
- Conducted Scoping Meetings throughout the corridor and prepared a Scoping Report (available on the Authority's website at <http://www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov/library> Sacramento - Merced tab)
- Organized Technical Working Groups (TWGs) representing staffs of corridor city and county jurisdictions and transportation providers and reviewed candidate alignments and station locations coming out of the scoping process and held initial TWG meetings
- Identified proposed Initial Alternatives to be evaluated through the Authority's Alternatives Analysis process
- Received input on the Initial Alternatives from the Working Group

Scoping

The scoping period officially began on December 23, 2009 with distribution of the Notice of Preparation (NOP) to the State Clearinghouse; a Notice of Intent (NOI) was published in the

Federal Register on December 30th, 2009. Merced – Sacramento Scoping Meetings were held in late January (refer to table below.) The comment period formally closed on February 26th, 2010.

County	Location	Date
Merced County	City of Merced	January 21, 2010
San Joaquin County	City of Stockton	January 20, 2010
Sacramento County	City of Sacramento	January 27, 2010
Stanislaus County	City of Modesto	January 28, 2010

Over 350 people attended these sessions; more than 150 comments were received including route options submitted on “draw your own” route maps and annotations on roll-out aerials delineated with the prior Program EIS alignments. (In addition to these meetings, the Sacramento – Merced was represented at the prior Altamont Corridor Scoping Meeting held in Stockton on November 12, 2009.)

Many comments were received in favor of the project for various reasons including economic development and job creation; congestion relief, energy conservation and general environmental benefits. Some comments suggested that the project should be “fast tracked” (scoping materials made it clear that this was a “Phase 2” segment with construction timing subject to funding).

In general, the alignments identified through the Scoping Process and subsequently reviewed by the Working Group and Technical Working Groups were identified in the 2005 Statewide Program EIS and, where applicable, in the 2008 Central Valley to Bay Area Program EIS. These are summarized below along with a limited number of additional options which were identified by the Working Group and/or Technical Working Group members. Various “loop” options were mentioned or delineated at various jurisdictions including Manteca, Escalon, and Turlock. These will be delineated and evaluated in the Alternatives Analysis (AA).

A new element of the project is the provision of additional stations which would serve as stops for regional services operating along the HST lines. Input was solicited from the Working Group on candidate locations for regional stations and suggestions for regional stations were received at the Scoping Meetings and shared with staff at the TWG meetings. The current maps of the initial alternatives include those regional stops which appear promising and which are recommended for further study in the AA.

Initial Alternatives Recommended for Consideration

North Area Map – Sacramento to Stockton

Input from the Scoping Meetings and subsequent review by the Working Group and Technical Working Group (TWG) participants confirmed the two principal route alternatives which converge approaching the identified downtown Sacramento depot:

- UPRR – The western alignment follows the UPRR Fresno Subdivision from Stockton north to Sacramento

- CCT – The eastern alignment generally follows the Central California Traction (CCT) right-of-way south to Lodi and then continues along a “Greenfield” alignment south to join the BNSF

HST stations would be provided in downtown Sacramento (at the City of Sacramento’s preferred location stacked over the proposed new Amtrak platforms in the SP Railyards site) and east of the existing ACE stop at Cabral Depot in downtown Stockton. Input from the Working Group resulted in identification of four candidate regional stops:

- 65th Street (intermodal with Sacramento RT)
- Elk Grove (north of Campbell Road)
- Galt (downtown)
- Lodi (downtown)

The sites for the regional stops were confirmed with the Cities at the TWG meeting. To provide a regional stop in downtown Lodi, the main line would run straight through downtown parallel to the UPRR. Options are included to reach this station from the CCT and to “mix and match” the east and west routes north and south of Lodi.

In a scoping comment received from UPRR, the railroad indicated it would accept an HST line within the former Western Pacific right-of-way for speeds up to 110 mph between Stockton and Sacramento; however only as far north as the Meadowview Road which would require patrons to use Sacramento RT to continue north. This option is not incorporated in the Initial Alternatives because it would not provide access to the preferred downtown Sacramento station and would traverse environmentally sensitive areas south of Sacramento, this alternative was considered and rejected as part of the Statewide Program EIR/EIS process.

Central Area Map – Stockton to Modesto

The eastern and western alignment alternatives continue through the central portion of the territory from Stockton south to Modesto. Cross-connections are provided between the eastern and western routes and the Altamont connections also occur in this area. Sub-segments are as follows:

- UPRR – The alignment generally follows the Fresno Subdivision of the UPRR.
- CCT / BNSF – The CCT right-of-way ends south of Lodi and the alignment continues cross-country to parallel the BNSF right-of-way approaching Escalon
- North-South and East-West Connectors – Located northeast of Manteca the cross-connectors will allow mixing and matching of the eastern and western alternatives
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The UPRR right-of-way is constrained by residential development on both sides through central Manteca. Candidate alignments to provide a by-pass loop either around the north and east or south and west were identified at the Scoping Meetings. These alignment options as well as regional station options for both Lathrop and Manteca were discussed at the TWG meeting. The

AA will refine and evaluate these loop and station options. The City of Escalon requested that a loop option to avoid the city should be studied in the AA.

South Area Map – Modesto to Merced

The two alignment alternatives continue south to Modesto and continue to Merced where the two alignments converge north of town to a single option providing access to the Merced station site along the UPRR:

- UPRR – The western alignment generally follows the UPRR and/or Highway 99; at some locations the alignment will shift into the Highway 99 right-of-way to avoid constraints along the UPRR
- BNSF – The eastern alignment generally follows the BNSF to a cross-country connection back to the UPRR south of Atwater

The Modesto City Council has voted to recommend that the HST station be located downtown along the UPRR alignment. The City of Riverbank has proposed a station along the BNSF alignment as an alternate to the Briggsmore (Amtrak) site in Modesto. The City of Turlock requested that the AA evaluate the potential for a regional stop downtown along the UPRR as well as a loop option which would bypass the city. These station and alignment options are recommended to be evaluated in the AA.

In summary, the Program alignments established in the 2005 Statewide Program EIS as well as refinements developed for areas south of Stockton in the 2008 Bay Area to Central Valley EIS provide a sound basis for the Initial Alternatives. The AA will focus on refinement of the specific location of the guideway centerline, establishing the locations of the regional stations, and determining which by-pass and cross-connections will be advanced for further study in the Draft EIR/EIS.

Attachments

- Initial Alternative Maps

Staff Recommendation

Staff requests approval of the proposed Initial Alignment Alternatives.